

## Ergonomics demonstration project: Nursing homes

### Need

Nursing home facilities in Washington State have the highest rates of Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSDs) in the state. This is one of the first industries that need to comply with the ergonomics rule.

In 1998, the Department of Labor and Industries began an initiative to provide an economic incentive to nursing homes to invest in new resident-handling equipment. In autumn 2000, representatives from the Department of Labor and Industries contacted the administrator of one of the facilities that participated in this initiative (in the control group) to discuss participation in an ergonomics demonstration project.

### Goals

The primary objectives of the nursing home demonstration project were to show that a nursing home facility can:

- Identify jobs in the facility that may fall into the category of caution zone jobs and would thus be covered by the ergonomics rule.
- Identify jobs with risk factors reaching a hazard level under the rule, therefore requiring controls to reduce exposure.
- Implement modifications to decrease hazards.

### Project design

The project team included an ergonomist/physical therapist from L&I's Safety & Health Assessment & Research for Prevention program along with the administrator and physical therapist assistant from the participating nursing home.

The team found that, while there were a number of risk factors for WMSDs present in the operations of the facility, only manual handling of residents would reach the hazard level under the ergonomics rule. Facility management and staff had already implemented controls to address this hazard by the integration of a zero-lift program in the facility. An active safety committee had already been meeting to identify problems and to brainstorm solutions. The committee and administrator had implemented a number of changes to address other risk factors not covered by the rule. These improvements included changes in equipment and operations for jobs in dietary, laundry, maintenance, and the office, as well as in some other nursing tasks.

## Timetable

October 2000.....	Initial meeting with administrator to discuss participation in a demonstration project
December 2000 .....	Meeting between ergonomist and administrator to discuss ergonomics rule and plans for project
January 2001 .....	Follow-up meeting between ergonomist and administrator to review activities done and progress made
March 2001.....	Ergonomist tours facility to view implementation of suggested improvements
May 2001.....	Two ergonomists tour facility to view improvements and take photos
September 2001 .....	Final Report
October 2001.....	Include project description on web site

## Results

The project will result in information the entire industry can use to help implement the ergonomics rule:

- A description of the project, along with the solutions, will be available through the Labor & Industries web site.
- Participants in the project, both from L&I and the facility, will be available for participation in other seminars and workshops.